

# POUNDS OF PREVENTION

- A Disaster Risk Reduction Summary -

*“Pounds of Prevention” is a series of short articles that illustrate how disaster risk reduction works and why it is important. Take a behind-the-scenes look at aid work in action, long before the disaster occurs. How is that possible? Read on!*

## FOCUS: THE PHILIPPINES

The people of the Philippines have been hit hard by the effects of Tropical Storm Washi. Heavy rains, storm surges, flash flooding, and landslides have rocked communities in the southern region of Mindanao. To help communities prepare for these types of disasters, the United States has been working with the Philippine government and regional and local groups to train and prepare responders for the past 15 years.

While the human and economic tolls of the storm are regrettably still high, they would have been even higher if not for investments made in disaster risk reduction. U.S.-funded training and preparedness programs have also contributed to the Philippine government’s ability to lead major rescue and relief operations, such as the one going on today.

Storms can be forecast, giving emergency responders a chance to prepare, organize timely evacuations, and reduce the impact on the population. Low-lying areas can be identified and structures reinforced. Relief supplies can be stockpiled and ready. First responders can be trained, and citizens can be on alert. USAID has provided financial and technical assistance to support all of these activities in recent years.

Since 1998, USAID has helped train professional emergency responders in the Philippines. The program has been instrumental in staffing Philippine search and rescue and first responder groups like the Philippines National Red Cross, the Bureau of Fire Protection, the Office of Civil Defense, and even the Armed Forces. Graduates must complete standardized coursework in medical first response, collapsed structure search and rescue, and hospital preparedness for mass casualties.

Another program has taught everyday people about disaster risks and what to do about them. By introducing disaster risk education into the secondary school curriculum, USAID and the Philippine Department of Education have helped students, teachers, administrators, and national-level education department managers learn practical ways to make their communities safer.

USAID has also supported the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ programs to partner with the Philippines National Red Cross and improve first responder capacity.

At the national level, USAID has enabled U.N. World Food Program specialists to assist the Philippine government with mapping hazard-prone areas and improving warehouse management of relief items.

USAID and the U.S. Forest Service have also worked to train Philippine emergency personnel in what is known as incident command system or ICS. ICS is important for coordination because it makes sure responders are “speaking the same language,” or in other words, are working under the same response framework. Most recently, in November 2011, American trainers conducted ICS training for disaster risk reduction and management councils in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Two more ICS training sessions are scheduled for January 2012.



*Disaster risk reduction and improving community resilience in the Philippines are shared goals of the U.S. and Philippine governments. Here first responders practice rescue operations as part of a USAID-funded training program.*